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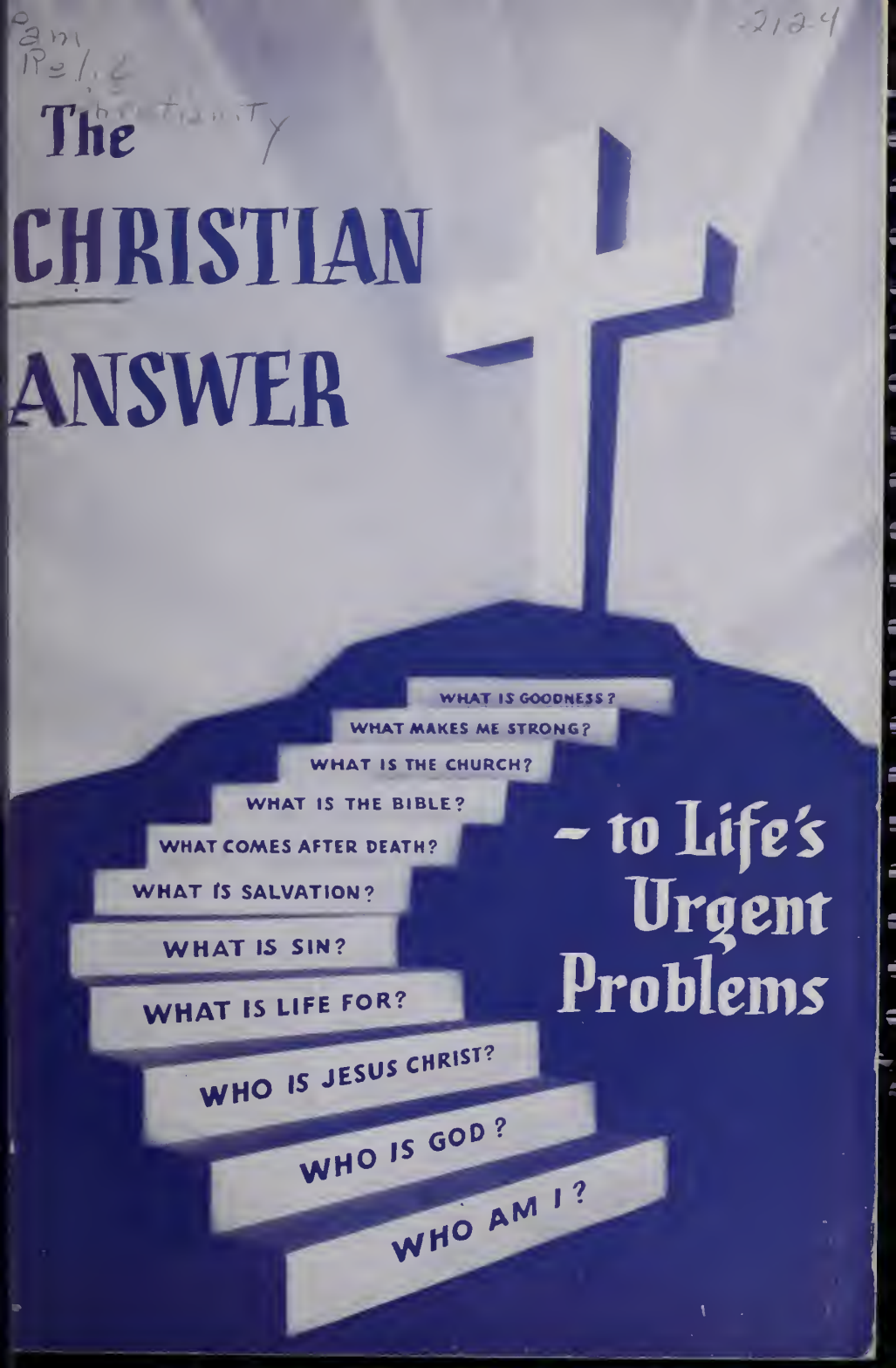
The CHRISTIAN ANSWER



– to Life's Urgent Problems

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I. WHO AM I?

YOU CAN begin your search for truth by looking at yourself. Put yourself before a mirror and ask who it is that is looking back at you. You see there a body of bone and tissue, physically enough like the animals that a good veterinary can serve you if you can find no other doctor. But back of those eyes you are staring into there is something else. The questioning, puzzled, half-amused look you see there puts you face to face with the fact of personality, and gives you an awed glimpse into the mysteries of the spirit. Mirror

"Who am I?" That is the first question of religion — and of practical daily living. You cannot decide what you want to do or to have or to be until you have some idea who you are. You have no way to make your daily decisions until you have some notion of what life is all about. In other words — you have to have religion. Need of religion

It is religion because it has to be based on faith. What you believe about yourself — and about God — and about life cannot be absolutely proved. You can be glad of that. If God tied us tight in proofs and dragged us to Him, we would have no chance to choose Him. He wants us to come through love, not calculation. If men could prove that goodness pays, all goodness would disappear in selfish common sense. Logic keeps the doorway to belief wide open, but it does not force us through. No proof

That does not mean that faith is blind. It has guides. How can we know which religion is right? Here are three hints on a subject which fills libraries: How know?

(1) True religion ***has to fit the world*** as you know it. It goes beyond daily experience and scholarship and science, but it cannot go against them. It cannot require you to believe that the sun is shining when you can see that it is raining. It might ask you to believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, which is unusual, but not that Jonah swallowed the whale, which is absurd. Your religion has to be a master plan into which all that you know will fit. Matches reality

Direct perception

(2) Recognizing truth is ***like falling in love***. Something in you responds to reality as it does not to error. You could not think it all out for yourself but, once it is told to you, you say, "Yes, that's it!" Intellect is only the next-to-the-highest human faculty.

It works

(3) A true religion ***has to work***. It will line you up with the way the universe operates; error will set you to futile bucking against life's currents. This does not mean that the religious person will have more money or better health or less suffering. It does mean that he will be better able to handle whatever circumstances come to him. He will be stronger, more serene, more deeply happy. Only right religion can save a country from breaking up against the laws of creation.

All have faith

Everyone has to live by faith. Judas had as much faith as John, but he put his faith in different things. The atheist makes as wild a guess as does the Christian — far wilder, indeed. The libertine is as abandoned to his theory as is the saint. Your faith may be shabby or sublime, it may be consistent or it may change every time your dinner disagrees with you — but you have to have a faith. The only question is, "Will that faith be right or wrong?"

Truth

There is no use saying that the faith which is right for one person may be wrong for another. A belief is either true or false. Two plus two do not make three or five in spiritual matters any more than they do in arithmetic. Whether you are nothing but a bundle of tissues or an immortal soul, you certainly are not both. There either is such a God as Jesus described or there is not.

Practical difference

Everything in life — happiness, love, success — depends on your hitting on the right answer to the question, "Who am I?" If you act on a mistaken idea about yourself, you are certain to get into trouble. If you think you are a child of God, and there really is no God, you will beat in your poor head against hard facts. And think of the damage of the opposite mistake!

Gen. 1:26

The Bible's opening chapters give you two tremendous statements about yourself. "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" That is who you are! Being made

in God's image means, not that you look like God, but that you are like Him. There is something in you which answers to Him. You are not a piece of the Divine Being, as the pantheists believe. Rather, you and the Ultimate Power of the universe have a kinship. You talk the same language — though you can spend eternity learning more of His words. You are not an orphaned waif, an unknown found on the doorstep of the world. You have connections. You are not alone and you need never be lonely.

In God's image

Genesis, which puts the depths of philosophy in pictures so simple that a child can understand them, says further, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." That is you. Physically you are nothing but the dust of the ground — first cousin to an animal and second cousin to a test tube. But God took this instrument of nerves and cells, which He may have spent a long time developing, and gave it to a living soul which He had made. You are not body and soul; you are a soul which is using a body — for awhile.

Gen. 2:7

Soul with body

With all this, you will still never get the full answer to your question, "Who am I?," until you hear what Jesus said. "Our Father," He called God, and declared that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." He said that the little child they wanted to send away was of infinite value to the Almighty Being. He told the story of the wayward son whose father's love never faltered. Of whom was He speaking? Of you. It was you whom God so loved that "He gave His only begotten Son." That is the sort of person you are.

God's love

Mat. 6:9
Mat. 10:30
Mat. 18:10
Lu. 15:11-32
Jn. 3:16

And there is more than that. To get the final answer to your question, "Who am I?" you must look at the cross on Calvary. All of history and philosophy is focused there. The cross demonstrates man's place in the universe. There the infinite Creator showed how much He cares for mankind. Stand before your mirror again and, as you see that mysterious something back of your eyes, remember all of this and say, "So that is what I am!"

The cross

II. WHO IS GOD?

To get an answer to the question "Who am I?" we referred to God. Now we had better consider who or what God is.

The word "God"

The word "God" can have a million meanings. That is why it is foolish to say, "I don't care about a man's creed so long as he believes in God." What he calls God may be what you would call a devil. Theology is simply the dictionary which says what you mean by the words you use when you talk about religion.

Inescapable

Everything in life depends for you on what you mean by that three letter word, "God." You may say, "I give up — it's all beyond me!" But every choice you make forces you to have some idea of what is the highest good.

Physical clues

The word "God" refers to the power behind everything. In that sense, everyone who is not incurably frivolous believes in God. For the astronomer, God is the principle of order in the skies. For the physicist, God is the mysterious might which packed the atom. For the biologist, God is the vital force surging out through all plant and animal life. For the philosopher, God is the first cause. All of these are right — but they stop too soon.

Human clues

Both ends of the telescope give us clues to the Source-Of-All, and the most revealing are at the bottom end — in the mind of the astronomer who calculates and thrills with awe. Along with the physical facts there are such facts as love and intelligence and conscience and goodness and a sense of beauty — and these cannot be higher than their Source, any more than a stream can run up hill. Such things cannot have sprung from what is unconscious and unintelligent and unmoral. As the

Ps. 94:9

Bible puts it, "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" The finest loves of earth give a clue to their Infinite Source —

Ps. 103:13

"Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord . . . "

Personal

To call God personal does not mean that He is an old man with a long white beard. It means that we trace to the very Source qualities which have no meaning apart from personality. It does not mean that we are shrinking our idea of God down to human terms, but that we are lifting it above the sub-

human. It means that we think God is more like a person than like a dynamo. We are only beginning to understand a tiny part of Him, but we come closest when we think of Him in terms of the highest that we know.

Shorter Catechism Q. 4

The Church's statement is "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." That means He is *at least* that, and infinitely more. When we can find higher terms for God we will use them. Meanwhile, we can stop with nothing less.

Our relation to God

To know that God is "He" and more than "It" makes our daily life completely different. We know then that there can be a personal relationship between us and the Ultimate Power in the universe. If that be true, then prayer is possible. More than that, failure to pray is an abnormality, since it is an ignoring of Reality. Prayer is the natural connection between a personal creature and a personal God.

Too vast?

Some people are frightened from this thought because they feel that the Infinite Being is too vast to be concerned with each one of the earth's millions. But infinite power is microscopic as well as telescopic. You can know ten people fairly well. God is so much greater than you that He can know ten billion people thoroughly. A God who could know only nations and centuries would be less great than a God who knows when every sparrow falls.

The Trinity

Christians have found that they know God in three ways — as they know the sun as the source of light and heat and solar gravity. We know God as the Father who controls the earth; we have found Him in Jesus Christ; and we have an inner knowledge of Him as the Holy Spirit. When talk of one which is three and three which are one begins to confuse us it has missed its purpose, for the idea of the Trinity should make God easier to know. The Bible names God in three ways so that we may see Him wherever we look.

II Cor. 13:14

The Holy Spirit

It is as the Holy Spirit that God is most intimately known. He is God within us. When God seems very close to us in prayer, when He comforts us in sorrow, when the voice of conscience guides us, when in beauty we sense the sublime — that is God the Holy Spirit.

There is mystery in the thought of God — but it is not the mystery of a closed door but of endless vistas which lead us on and on. God is so knowable that little children can love Him dearly, and so awesome that the heavenly hosts fall down on their faces before Him, unable to endure the presence of His glory. To know Him is more important for you than your job, or your food, or your health, or your family. Apart from Him everything is wrong; with Him everything is right.

III. WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

The test question

WHO IS Jesus Christ — for you? Your answer to that determines your whole life. Nations and eras are judged by their attitudes to Christ.

An attractive man

Perhaps for you now He is only a wonderful person — a heroic figure from the long ago. That is a good place to start. Many of His first followers came to Him simply because He was the most attractive person they had ever met. He was the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem. Children ran to His arms. People loved Him for Himself. But as they followed they found in Him what took them clear beyond all earthly depths. They came to see Him as divine because they just could not keep on thinking of Him in merely human terms.

More than a man

You can take that way. Read His teachings. Study the marvel of His life. Catch His quality as He goes to His crucifixion. See what He has been doing through the centuries and is still doing today. If, with open mind and heart, you follow this course you are likely to end, as so many others have done, by bowing your head and exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!"

His claims
Jn. 10:30
Mat. 9:2
Mat. 11:28

There are other reasons. We have to explain His claim to divinity, His taking the Messiah's role — "I and the Father are one," "Your sins are forgiven," "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." These are either the ravings of a madman or the deceit of an outrageous liar or they are true. But those first two possibilities just will not fit the story. Never was a mind more balanced or less liable to evil.

Historical evidence

Some have wondered whether Jesus ever lived. No serious scholar doubts it today. The sudden twist which human history took early in the first century must have had some powerful cause. The character of Jesus is totally different from that which the religious imagining of His time would have invented. It is psychologically impossible that the tendency to add legends to the life of an unusual person would have produced the sort of story the Gospels tell. The record of Jesus and what He has done to the world must be explained. Strange and mysterious though it is, the best explanation is still that, when

the human race was ready, at the crisis point of history, God gave a special revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

Present evidence

Not all the evidence is in the past. Jesus has been present through the centuries. He is with us today as no mortal man could be. You would welcome a memorial to any other hero, but how would you feel if you came upon a monument which said, "Erected to the memory of Jesus of Nazareth who departed this life nineteen centuries ago"? We do not remember Him — we meet Him.

How He is divine

Thinkers' statements of how Jesus Christ is God are like a child's explanation of the solar system. Some say that all men have the Spirit of God and Christ has more than others. But that will not do. Christ is not merely greater — He is different. The seers and prophets have been on man's side, reaching out toward God; Christ is on God's side, reaching out toward man. If the greatest of men were to walk into the room, we would all rise; if Christ were to walk into the room we would all drop to our knees.

The Word

Christ is the Word — the language of Heaven translated into man's vocabulary. The world and man's inner sense of God give clues to Him — but they leave souls hungry before the mysterious and unknowable. Abstract ideas cannot satisfy men's hearts. They will bow before a carved stone if they have nothing more definite to worship. Jesus makes God very real and definite.

II Cor. 4:6

His followers see "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Like a crack in a live volcano, He gives us a glimpse into the very heart of the universe.

Mediator

He is the Mediator — closing the gap so that men can reach God. Because of Him we need no priesthood to relay our communication to the Divine. We bring our confession and our petitions directly to God, and we close our prayers, "Through Jesus Christ. Amen."

Shows goodness

Jesus gave God's rules for living. And He demonstrated how perfect goodness looks in our human scene. He makes right living a form of comradeship with Him.

Christianity

Christianity is not a ritual or a philosophy or a science — it is a relationship to a Person. That is why the man who cleans

your ash pit may be a better Christian than the greatest scholar in the land. To know Jesus Christ is to have religion. We can know Him as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. We can know Him as the ideal Man, with His gentleness and strength and courage and joyousness and love of beauty — above all who ever lived the perfect hero type. We can know Him as a Savior and as a Friend, whose word to us is, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." *Mat. 28:20*

IV. WHAT IS LIFE FOR?

Why God made you

I Jn. 4:16

WHY DID God make you? The Bible tells why, in the shortest and best definition of God that has ever been given — "God is love." Love cannot exist in loneliness; love wants to share good things. Therefore, God gave you life.

Shorter Catechism Q. 1

The catechism begins, "Question 1 — *What is the chief end of man?* Answer — *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.*" In other words, your purpose in life is to be a good advertisement for your Maker and to enjoy living. Those purposes merge. You glorify God when you enjoy life, and you enjoy life when you glorify God by loving and obeying Him.

Happiness

Mat. 5:2-11

All God's commandments have the theme, "Thou shalt not make a bad bargain with life." If stealing, lying and adultery could lead to happiness, the Ten Commandments would have required them. Christ commenced the Sermon on the Mount with His rules for happy living. Melancholy defeats God's purpose.

Hardship

I Tim. 6:17

This does not mean that life is intended to be easy. The Bible describes this world as a place of struggle to fit us for something better. Happiness is not always a laughing matter. It is the deep happiness of those who fight and win which Christianity offers. Good Christians do not escape trouble — but they are amazingly tough. They cannot be defeated. They know that God never closes all the doors to joy. A sour face is a heresy because, as Paul said, our loving God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

V. WHAT IS SIN?

We just saw what God's purpose for man's life is. Sin is whatever thwarts that purpose. It is whatever spoils the plot of the glorious romance which God intended to be the story of your life.

Modern man has dropped the word "sin" from his vocabulary — and so the world is perishing of a disease without a name. Sin is our frustration and lovelessness, our enmity and worry and feverish materialism. Many people are dogged by futility and boredom. Many are disappointed in themselves, harried by memories they cannot change, ashamed of habits they cannot break. Minds are battlefields of contrary impulses and crossed up emotions. That man is lost in sin who has lost his enthusiasm, who has lost his purpose in living, who has lost his sense of God. Sin is not only wrong doing but a wrong inward state, though each will produce the other.

Inner discord

If you run afoul of the physical laws you get hurt; just as surely, if you break life's spiritual laws you get into trouble. That is sin's punishment. But sin is more than that. It is personal — it is disloyalty to a love. It is a wrong done to a loving God. It requires forgiveness. That is why man by himself cannot make it right.

Law and love thwarted

God exists, so living which ignores Him is sure to be out of order. We were designed to be centered on God, so that when we operate around any other center we pound ourselves to pieces, like a flywheel which is out of balance.

Collision with reality

The whole world is cursed by sin, and every human being has a tendency to evil. Why is that? Some say that it is because we are souls in animal bodies, so that the passions and impulses of our physical nature are forever dragging us toward evil. Some locate the source of all sin in our pride; we refuse to submit to God and so we become the slaves of evil.

Universal

Rom. 3:23

Our sin comes from our freedom. God did not want fellowship with puppets but with people. He therefore had to make us free to sin, if we so chose. But sinning tears away our power to choose good. Only their Creator can give back to sinners the freedom they have lost.

From freedom

VI. WHAT IS SALVATION?

Man's tragedy

WE HAVE seen how the story of mankind tends to tragedy. A loving God has created beings who could enjoy His goodness and respond to His love. But they have turned their backs on Him. They have used their freedom to spoil His creation. They have driven themselves from Eden. That is the story of your life. It is the story told by the headlines in your newspapers. It is the story of your neighbors' broken hopes and broken homes and broken hearts.

God's love
Jn. 3:16

But God wrote another chapter to the story; "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Lost

Jesus Christ came to set a world that is lost back on the path. "Lost" means that you have missed your way. It means waking in the morning without any great purpose to make the day worth while. It means being lost from certainties. It means realizing in middle-age that you are not as fine a person as in your youth you had expected to be. It means turning the God-given power in the atom to destruction, and not to blessing, so that the old saying that the world is lost without Christ now has a physical meaning, with a time limit attached.

New life
Rom. 6:23

Jesus Christ takes us back to God. He heals our sick souls and satisfies our hungers. He gives us beauty in place of ugliness and joy instead of discontent, and peace for our troubled minds and light through our darkness.

The cross
I Thess. 5:10

How does He do this? Partly by His teachings; partly by the attraction of His marvelous life which makes us want to follow Him. But Christians have always known that it is specially by His death and resurrection that Jesus has made them able to rise out of their sins into new life.

Atonement
Mat. 26:28

Our aversion to the crude use of the expression, "saved by the blood of Christ," as a sort of incantation may make us forget that it is true. We cannot trace the mechanics of something so far beyond where our minds operate, but we cannot doubt the fact. The Bible never explains how this comes about. It simply asks us to accept it with wonder and joy.

It does say, what we all feel, that our sinning piles up a weight of guilt on us which not even God's love can simply brush away. The wrong we do leaves us owing something that we cannot pay. It is because Jesus gave Himself for us that we can get release from this. If He had sidestepped the crucifixion there would be no Church today.

Guilt

As we see on the cross what our sort of sins did to this man of perfect love and goodness, it makes us hate their awful ugliness as nothing else could. As we see there the wonder of His love for us, it does something in us which neither teaching nor punishment could do.

The cross reveals sin

It happens because Jesus Christ is more than a man. He has direct connections with every human being. His crucifixion reveals a love that is at the very heart of all creation. That is why a person who has been dragging along, cynical and snarled in guilt, gets a new view of what life is really like when he sees that Jesus loved him so much that He died to set him free from evil — a view that can send him out transformed, like a man released from prison. As we realize that Jesus rose triumphant from His death, we find the power to leave our sinful selves and join Him in newness of life.

The cross reveals love

Rom. 5:8

The tie between us and this is faith. Faith is an elusive word because its meaning in religion is not the meaning it has in common use. It does not mean accepting something as true. You may accept the whole Creed as fact, and be a complete heathen. "The devils also believe, and tremble."

Faith

Jas. 2:19

Faith means giving yourself to something. It means giving yourself to Jesus Christ so completely that He becomes the Lord of all your life. It means such a devotion to Him that His spirit actually moves into your body.

Gal. 2:20

What Christ did for us must be answered by what we do if this new life is to be ours. We must say to Him in deep sincerity, "I am dissatisfied with myself and ashamed of all my sins (here think of definite sins). I long to be what God intended me to be. Lift me, by the love I see upon the cross. Take command of my life, as I give myself to Thee. Be the Lord and Master of my every thought and act. Be with me now and evermore. Amen."

What we do

VII. WHAT COMES AFTER DEATH?

A practical question

PLAYING WITH that question can be a sort of parlor game. Or we may shun it for fear of commercializing goodness by tying it to rewards and punishments. But the question is strangely practical. When men drop the idea of a future life they tend to play fast and loose with this one. History shows that cultures which lose the belief in immortality tend to tyranny and social evils — because temporary creatures get less respect than do immortal souls.

You may not worry much about yourself, but when someone you love dies, and you are appalled by the thought that something so fine may just be thrown away — then you are facing what you think of God and of the decency of things.

Christian logic

The Christian reasons that: (a) God is good. (b) A human personality is precious. (c) A good God would not discard what is precious. (d) Therefore, human personality is saved.

Bible teachings

John 14:1-5

The Bible teaches that the soul uses the body like an instrument it can do without. We shall recognize each other after death. Love is not broken. We will remember the life on earth. We will be freer. Life will go on in the direction it had in this world. Those pointed toward God rise nearer to Him.

I Cor. 15:12-20; 35-58

Those inclined away from God go farther from Him — which is a terrible enough thought without adding pitchforks, as the Bible never does. The common ideas of Heaven and Hell are confused by pictures from heathen mythology and deviled meat cans.

The Bible cannot give us guide-book descriptions of the next world because all our words and imaginings are limited to the sort of things we have seen. The Bible does give us

Symbols

symbols with the meaning — "It is like this only infinitely more so." Harps stand for beauty, singing for joy, bodies for selfhood, thrones for glory, burning for disposal of what is useless, torment for the misery of godlessness.

Other ideas

The impossibility of imagining the life to come has led people to try to tie it to this world. Some believe in a dreary round of rebirths in other bodies. This denies the onward call of God and has no meaning when we ask what sort of identity

the soul carries from one body to the next. Some believe our immortality is only in our influence on future generations. But this preserves only a tiny part of the real personality, and often gives the largest immortality to the least worthy souls. Such earth-bound solutions only postpone the problem, for astronomers are sure that the earth itself will some day be destroyed.

If those beyond sent signals to us, the next world would be only a physical annex of this one. We have our hold on it by faith, not by sound waves nor sight. But once we know that Jesus Christ is still alive, we know that death is an illusion and life is real. The Christian faith leaves us looking out into endless vistas of beauty and glory and joy. It answers the question, "Who am I?" with the assurance, "You are a child of God, whose love you know through Jesus Christ — a love on which you can depend today and tomorrow and through everything that lies ahead."

Rom. 8: 11, 18, 24, 38,39

VIII. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Revelation

BY HIMSELF man would be imprisoned in life's mysteries. His earth-bound mind could never break out to discover what and why and from where he is. God would be vaguely felt but unknowable. But man is not by himself. God is love, and it is the nature of love to communicate. The record of God's communication is in the Bible.

God's spokesmen

God chose special men to transmit His revelations. And He chose a special nation. Just as an industry will use one of its small plants to introduce a new process, God used one people, living at the cross roads of the Orient and Occident. God was not neglecting the Incas and the Malays when He gave His special revelations to the Hebrews. He has "left not Himself without witness." All peoples "show the work of the law written in their hearts." And what God did in Palestine was for the benefit of all mankind.

Acts 14:17

Rom. 2:15

Contents

The Bible gives us the deepest truths about the universe and human destiny. Its rules for getting the most from life are our Manufacturer's Directions. It demonstrates its laws by accounts of great and ruined nations, of blessed and broken lives. Its poetry lifts our souls to sublime heights which they could never scale alone. It is the voice of a loving Father. It is a personal contact with the Infinite Power.

The Bible tells us of Jesus Christ — of what He said and did and does. It brings us into the company of those who knew Him on earth. Its first accounts of Him were written within about fifteen years of His time on earth.

Unsatisfied curiosity

The Bible tells us enough to satisfy our needs — but not enough to satisfy our curiosity. When churches tell more than the Bible does about such matters as their own powers and departed souls and heavenly dealings, Christianity becomes distorted. "Where the Bible is silent, we are silent," is a good rule for a Church.

Literary forms

The Bible uses many literary forms. If parts of the Old Testament, which some had thought to be history, turn out to be inspired truth in parables, they are no less the word of God. Ancient writers often used the apocalyptic form to give

a message in gorgeous imagery without intending a literal meaning for each verse.

Ironical passages, as in Ecclesiastes, set up the world's fallacies so that faith can knock them down. The Bible shows the awesome spectacle of a primitive people, whose early ideas of God were semi-barbaric, being given ever higher perceptions of Him until they receive the perfect truth in Jesus Christ.

How do we know that the Bible is the word of God? We know it, not by blind faith, but by "the Holy Spirit bearing witness." As we read, something within us says, "This is of God." It was this inner recognition which collected the Bible from among the other Hebrew and Greek writings which the Church once used and threw away. Those we have were long recognized as totally different. It was a sort of afterthought when the Church finally said officially, "These are the Bible."

The Holy Spirit's witness
Confession of Faith I:V

There may be parts which the Holy Spirit has not yet made your working Bible. It does not have to be all or none. If there are any parts which are God's truth for you, you have a Bible. But do not ignore the rest. Christians constantly find that parts which have seemed obscure, perhaps even baffling or offensive, all at once come blazing into light.

Enlarging

Miracles may bother you. Christian philosophy allows for them. Nature's God can manage nature. Remember that there were special reasons for the Bible's miracles which do not exist today. There will be no occasion for another virgin birth until there is another incarnation. So it is with all Christ's miracles. Not one of them is pointless. They all demonstrate some timeless truth. But if any Bible miracle remains a hopeless problem for you, steer around it and keep going. Do not let it keep you from the miracle of the Bible itself. It has today the power that makes men great and topples governments. It is still more up-to-date than this morning's newspaper.

Miracles

Protestants believe that God can speak directly to everyone from the Bible. Teachers and study books are helpful, but no priestly interpreter can deny your right to read for yourself what the Bible says. Therefore a hearsay knowledge is not adequate. You must find for yourself what the Bible says to you.

For everyone

IX. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

From God
Eph. 1:22-23

THE CHURCH, Christians believe, is not a human institution at all. God put it on earth through Jesus Christ. The history of the past twenty centuries gives reason for this faith. Throughout these years the strange power which the New Testament promises to the Church has actually come from it into human lives and into nations. When it has fallen into the hands of unworthy men, some mysterious quality has enabled it to rise from its betrayal more fresh and youthful than before.

What church?

But what church do we mean? We see cathedrals and gospel tabernacles, new cults and ancient hierarchies. Which of these is Christ's Church?

"We only"

The "we only" churches have an answer. Counting on some external sign — a sacrament or creed or succession of hands on heads — they all claim that theirs is the only true Church. But tying spiritual claims to external conditions makes straight for superstition — and absurdity.

Channel from God
Ezek. 47:1-12

Jer. 2:13

It may help us find the answer if we remember the Bible's repeated picture of the Church as the channel of the water of life, with God as its "fountain of living waters." The Church is wherever people together are getting the spiritual supply that comes from God and living by it. Some churches have mixed this with so much of the dust and corruption of the earth that it is unwholesome. Some have let accumulations so fill the channel that the flow has almost stopped, though the worshipers still gather around.

Connection to God

The Holy Spirit and the Bible show a church how to be connected so directly with the Source that the flow will be pure and strong. Right origins and creed and worship may help — though good connections may be the most readily stopped up because pride diminishes the daily labor of keeping them clear. The connections of the true Church are invisible. They do not go through ancestors. They go directly from the fellowship of believers to God.

In its early years the Church had heroic and miraculous success. Then it suffered two corruptions. First, the emperor Constantine made it a state institution. It became gaudy and

worldly and political. The Bishop of Rome was enabled by his connections with the government to dominate the Church. Forgeries soon claimed for him a succession from Peter, though the Bible never says that Peter had any successor or went to Rome or was head of the Church. It shows James as the Church's presiding head. Paul says of Peter, "I withstood him to the face." The great text in which Christ says of Peter's recognition of Him as the Son of God, "Upon this rock I will build my Church," was distorted to make Peter himself the Church's foundation. The Bible would surely have mentioned something so important if Christ had really entrusted His work to an elaborate and pretentious hierarchy.

Spoiled by politics

Gal. 2:11

Mat. 16:18

The second corruption came from bringing into the Church masses of unconverted heathen because their rulers claimed conversion. The Church did not change their pagan ideas — it absorbed them by compromise. Altars and polytheism and magic and priestcraft and Hades came into the Church under new names.

Pagan mixture

With all this, the Church never completely lost the spirit and the power of Christ. It tamed the savagery of the Dark Ages and preserved the Scriptures.

This unbreakable touch with Christ and the Bible kept men rebellious at the evils of their Church. As enlightenment spread, in spite of torture and death, this indignation grew. Earlier reformers had everything Martin Luther had except a way to stay alive. Those who were free to follow God's leading welcomed the Reformation. The map tells the story. Every country which was protected by distance or mountains from the bloody police power of Rome became Protestant. Ireland, embittered by oppression of another sort, is perhaps the one exception. Some rulers, not all of them good men, protected the reform because it offered them escape from Rome's political oppression. Peoples were set free to read the Bible, to think and to worship. A new experience of Christ brought a springtime of enlightened thinking and purer living. Democracy began to flower.

Reform

The Reformation brought changes in the Roman Church. Some of the abuses were stopped. Other abuses were defended.

Hierarchy

The hierarchy took steps to protect itself from any more independent thinking by clamping the Church in more rigid authority. This has a dictatorship's impressiveness and efficiency. It gives definite guidance and discourages private folly. But it also avoids that free striving by which the Christian grows. It hinders a soul's direct communion with its God. It brings the abuses which come from arbitrary power and blocks the reform which can come only through free consciences.

Eastern Orthodox

Centuries before the Reformation the churches in eastern Europe refused to be controlled by Rome. They are today the Orthodox Church. They feel that theirs is the original Christian Church because of its unbroken tradition. Roman Catholics say that theirs is because of its continuous government. Protestants say that theirs is because the Reformation restored the Church which Roman and Orthodox errors had obscured.

Protestants

The Reformation produced some giants of Bible scholarship. Some of these started movements which remain today as denominations. John Calvin, for example, influenced scores of religious refugees who came to Geneva in Switzerland. These went home to found Calvinistic (Presbyterian) Churches all over Europe. Protestants were divided by geography and by being early or late stages in the Reformation. And there have been fresh movements, like that which started the Methodist Church two centuries ago.

Denominations

Most of Protestantism is essentially one Church under different names. Eighty per cent of Protestant Americans are in six great denominational groups, and most of them could be at home in any of these groups. There is some advantage in having a variety of forms of worship available because people do not all find in the same way their best help in approaching God. Variety adds richness to the knowledge of the inexhaustible truth of Christ, and prevents a dull and rigid uniformity.

One fellowship

But denominations bring a constant temptation to strife and pride and trust in nonessentials. They waste the Church's force by inefficiency. These evils are lessening. In sympathy and in common action Protestants are constantly drawing closer

together — at every level, from the small town to the world-wide "ecumenical" Council of Churches.

What, out of all this, is the Church? Wherever people together are finding God through Jesus Christ, and are trying to worship and serve Him, they have the Church. As the Reformation put it, "Where the word of God is rightly preached and heard, there is the Church." The Church goes through history, glorious as an army with banners. The gates of Hell and man's folly cannot prevail against it. It is the strength of nations. It has the mysterious power which every life needs.

What makes a church

Can a person be a Christian outside the Church? The water of life, which the Church draws from its Source, is poured into the community. People may have some of this spilled-over inspiration and teaching without ever coming near a church. It can produce noble lives. But those who say, "I believe in Christianity but not churchianity" forget that Christianity has never gone where the Church has not gone. The Bible makes it plain that one cannot be completely obedient to Christ and stay aloof from the fellowship of His followers. God grants a blessing through His Church which cannot be had in any other way. If one who is trying to follow Christ could not find a church that was worthy of his membership, he would have to start one.

Essential?

To keep our souls from being stifled by material cares we need the Church's reminders of God and its promptings to worship and duty. Our bewildered fellow men, groping for faith and tempted by false gods, need to know what we have found. We are not likely to shout it from a soap box. But when we join the Church all who know us see that we have taken a stand for Jesus Christ.

Our need

The Church needs us in its great work of proclaiming the Gospel, supporting democracy, fighting social evils, strengthening homes, giving ideals to youth. In no place on earth, where there has not been a Christian Church, could you send your children to a public school or vote in a free election or have a diseased appendix treated. The Church's work is always partly undone because it needs more help like yours. Do you see faults in the Church? That is a special reason for you to join it,

The Church's need

because only the members have a chance to make the Church what God wants it to be.

Who can join

A perfect life is not required of those who join — the Church is the place for sinners who are trying to be better. Perfect faith is not required — we spend a lifetime in the Church growing in belief. Only four or five basic questions are asked — "Do you accept Jesus Christ as the Divine Lord of your life?", "Will you try to be a loyal member of the Church?" . . . Those who have not been are baptized. The only invitation to join the Church which you need is the one that Jesus Christ has given.

What is joined

When people join the Church, the local congregation is only a door that they use. Whenever they move they simply shift their connection to another congregation in the great Church of Jesus Christ. To this their love and loyalty belong. It is a home for their souls, a center for their daily living, a place for work which gives them greatness, the scene of their finest friendships, a source of endless blessings.

The Church above

More than that — the Church is a fellowship which goes clear beyond this world. The "Communion of Saints" joins those in this world who worship God to those who worship Him in Heaven. The Church on earth is a part of the Church above. When you join it you come close to the Christians everywhere on earth, and to the Apostles, and to the Saints, and to those we love whom death has taken from our sight, but who are still near us in this fellowship which death can never break.

X. WHAT MAKES ME STRONG?

YOUR SOUL is not rigid. It is alive. It can shrivel or grow great. The Bible and centuries of Christian experience tell the ways which make souls strong:

PRAYER. We pray because God is — and because He has made us for Himself so that our hearts are restless until they rest in Him. Prayer is so natural that life is distorted without it. Everyone is born with the ability to pray, though it grows with use.

How to pray

Real praying requires effort, though it leaves us refreshed. Wandering thoughts may be kept on a prayer by putting it into words — spoken or written or inwardly formed. Devotional reading may prepare us. We can pray anywhere at any time, though closed eyes shut out distractions and a reverent position helps make a reverent mind. Regular times for prayer — morning, mid-day, bed time — keep it a regular part of living and make a right mental state come habitually at those times. The knowledge of God's constant presence makes the day bring frequent occasions for prayer — some of them only the brief darting of a thought to Him.

Content

We start our prayers by thinking of God, of who He is and what He means to us — seeing Him as Jesus showed Him. We confess our faults and seek for cleansing. We tell God of our love and thanks. We lay our problems before Him and think to the answers in His presence. We ask for things for ourselves and others. We ask Him to take us and use us.

Results

Prayer can have definite effects — healing the sick, guiding the puzzled, shaping the destiny of nations. It is no substitute for doing all we can. All prayer and no medicine is as wrong as all medicine and no prayer. We should not expect selfish external effects which would lose the world's order in a tangle of cross purposes. Magic tries to pull God down to man's desires but prayer tries to lift man up to God's desires.

God's answer

How do we know that our prayer is real? Sometimes it brings a glowing sense of God's presence. Sometimes we feel no answer — until next day we find a peace and strength and

joy which could not have come in any other way. "Who rises from his knees a better man, his prayer is answered."

Public worship

CHURCH SERVICES. There is an experience of God that we never have by ourselves. There is an inspiration which comes only when people are together. A church service by radio is as welcome and as unsatisfying as a courtship by telephone; books on religion are as useful and as incomplete as love letters. In worship with others God gives a miracle of blessing which we all need. It does not come just from the music or the sermon or the prayers. It is an effect which is greater than all the causes we can trace. Regular church services give a framework for living. They keep us reminded of what we otherwise forget.

Intimate worship

DEVOTIONAL FELLOWSHIP. Midway between private and public worship there is a third sort all Christians need. It is found in the intimacy of little groups — in family worship and prayer meetings. The glow which kindles from heart to heart in such a fellowship can restore the sense of God when other sorts of prayer have gone cold.

Bible study

BIBLE READING. The Bible is our handbook for daily living. In it we meet God. Therefore we need a first-hand knowledge of it, and we need to read it regularly. Some people read a chapter every night before they go to bed. Others use it to start the day, when their minds are fresher. Sunday gives a chance to read large portions. It is well to read with a pencil, underlining or writing comments.

How

The King James Version is the most beautiful, but the meaning comes more easily from a newer one, such as the Revised Standard. A one-volume Bible commentary or other helps are useful, and almost necessary for mature study. But do not wait for special books. Just start reading and put question marks beside what is not understood. Even beginners will find that the underlinings outnumber the question marks. You can start right through from Genesis, but you may bog down in Leviticus. A better plan may be to start with the Gospels and then go on to the other books which interest you, constantly enlarging the circle. (See page 31)

THE SACRAMENTS. "A sacrament is the visible sign of an invisible grace." It is an act of faith which brings a Divine blessing. Christ gave us two sacraments — baptism, to start the Christian life, and the Lord's Supper, to keep it going.

What a sacrament is

Baptism is the initiation ceremony into the fellowship of Christ and of all those who, like Him, have been baptized. It saves becoming a Christian from a cloudy indecisiveness and marks it with a definite event. It signifies the beginning of a new life. Its water shows the cleansing which Christ gives.

What baptism does

Babies in Christian homes are in the Christian fellowship. In their parents' love and prayers and teachings they are learning about Christ from before their earliest memories. Therefore baptism, which marks the starting of the Christian life, is given to babies. In it they are pledged to Christ, and their parents are ordained to the most sacred office that anyone can have. There is no magic in it. A "Christ-ening" means nothing unless the child really is led to be a Christian. In a sense it is not completed until what the parents promised is "confirmed" as the child comes into full church membership and says, "I have been brought to follow Jesus Christ."

Infant baptism

The ***Lord's Supper*** is so great that new Christians are often puzzled by it, and sometimes disappointed. All our lives we can find deeper and richer meanings in each observance of it. Here are things we may remember when we come to the Communion; (a) Think of love. Just as one might give a picture to a friend at parting, Jesus took the meal time gathering which had meant so much to Him and His disciples and said, to them and to us, "When you do this think of me." It conveys the Divine love and the love which joins Christians to each other — there in the same room, and around the world. (b) Think of satisfaction for the hungers of our souls — hungers for beauty and goodness and truth and high purposes. (c) Think of the inner strength which God gives through Christ — strength to triumph over anything that life can bring. (d) Think of the confirming of our promises to God and His to us by the ancient ceremony of breaking bread. (e) Think of salvation. At the Lord's Supper we renew our acceptance of His giving Himself for us, and we take its benefits more fully into our

Communion service

lives. (f) Think of our union with Christ. In a mysterious way Christ is actually received within us. Paul could say, "Christ liveth in me." Christ uses the bodies of modern Christians to do His work. They do it by His power that is in them. We can have some of His goodness and love and peace because He is in us.

The inner miracle

The miracle which transforms the bread and grape juice into the body and blood of Christ does not take place on an altar — it takes place in believers. Only those who receive these elements in love and faith actually commune. That does not require unusual goodness — it is a gift for sinners. But it is important that we try in advance to be ready.

THE SABBATH. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," is a law for spiritual health. The Sabbath is our shelter from the vexations and cares which pursue us all the week. It is our chance to catch our breath, to repossess our souls, to make room for God and for all the finest things in life. Whatever rules you make to protect your Sabbath can be called artificial and arbitrary — but if you have no rules you have no Sabbath. There is stored up wisdom in the traditions of the Church which reserve the Sabbath for church and family and friendships and good reading — and rule out business and school work and commercialized amusements and competitive games. "The Sabbath was made for man" — not for man at his most trivial but for man at his highest and best.

Right use of Sunday

FRIENDSHIP. Robinson Crusoe could not have been a normal Christian. Solitary religion is unhealthy. It cannot develop soundly away from the friendship of others who share the faith. A member who attended church only as a spectator attends a theater would miss something essential. A church is a home where the members of a family meet to enjoy each other. Its clubs and work and friendships are valuable aids to the Christian life.

Christian friendship

SERVICE. If we are to be spiritually strong we must have both nourishment and exercise. That is why God gave us an unfinished world and a Church whose success depends upon our efforts. Strength comes only with exertion — teaching a Sunday School class, doing hard church work, battling

Exercise

unchristian tendencies in the community. We never really know Jesus until we feel Him by our sides as we give ourselves to acts of love and service.

OTHER WAYS. Everything which increases our appreciation of truth or goodness or beauty can make us strong. Music and art and great books and the enjoyment of the out-of-doors can do it. These are the things that get pushed from our lives unless we take deliberate care to make room for them.

XI. WHAT IS GOODNESS?

Christian traits

YOU SHOULD be able to tell a Christian by the way he walks down the street. When you accept Jesus' slant toward God and man and destiny, it transforms everything about you from your conscience to your sense of humor. To take Jesus as the Lord of all life makes such a difference that the Bible says it is like being born again. Unless Christians are very unlike those who do not share their faith, something is wrong.

Christ guides us less as a lawgiver than as a companion. He said that the Ten Commandments are right, but far from adequate. The Sermon on the Mount is not a rule book — it is a picture book. It says, "If you look like this, you are a Christian." It is love — love for God and man — which tells a Christian what he ought to do. But he would be wrong to ignore what other Christians through the years have discovered about the way to live. This accumulated wisdom is transmitted through the Church. Here are some of its great words:

Their source

TRUTH. The love of truth is akin to the love of God, for truth is with Him. Deceit breaks faith with reality and thus does a wrong to God and man. The Christian advertiser, historian, scientist and neighbor will have reverence for truth.

PURITY. The power to bring a life into the earth is of God. Sex is sacred. As the expression of the highest love between a woman and a man it is the source of endless beauty. Anything less is a perversion which corrodes the soul.

LIFE. A Christian is so in love with life that he wants to live it to the full. In play or work or friendship, he is impatient with what makes life shallow or mechanical.

LOVE. A Christian's thoughts are turned to others. His chief interests are outside himself. By this he is saved from the sensitiveness and resentment and selfishness and pride which spoil a mind that is turned inward on itself. Quarreling and anger are ruled out by love.

HOME. God is the third party in a Christian marriage. His presence makes a home a sort of church, with its loves blessed and strengthened by Him. Divorce may not always be a sin, but it is always a tragedy.

VOCATION. A Christian sees his daily work as a calling with its most commonplace duties shining with the glory of serving God and man, and with Christian ethics controlling all his dealings.

CONSECRATION. A man's confession of faith is written in his check book. It tells what he really believes are the highest values. A Christian knows that all that he has is God's property, from which he asks God for an allowance. To devote one-tenth to church and charity is an honored Christian tradition. Energy and skill are also trusts from God to be used for Him.

SHARING THE FAITH. The grateful Christian knows that what Christ has done for him He can do for anyone. He is appalled that people are living and dying without ever finding through Christ how wonderful life can be. All his love for God and for his fellow men gives him a burning eagerness to help others find what he has found. A Christian never fully understands his faith until he has tried to express it to someone else. The results of our attempts to share our faith show that miracles still happen.

There are no fences around a Christian's love and pity. He keenly feels the needs of men in all the world. The health of a church can be measured by its interest in missions. This shrinking world is doomed if powerful peoples anywhere follow evil faiths. Men and mankind must be saved through Jesus Christ.

UNWORLDLINESS. How about such matters of conscience as smoking or playing cards or dancing? It is true that small scruples let the mean-minded escape important virtues by a substitute morality which says, "I know I am a Christian because I do not smoke." But the love of Christ leaves no room for small disloyalties. Whatever makes full Christian living less likely for ourselves or others is wrong. Gambling and drinking endanger the sort of life that God intended. Christians are always under pressure from those who do not share their faith and so cannot understand their principles.

SOCIAL CONSCIENCE. Sin is both personal and social. You may be personally faultless and yet base with the evil of

your nation or race or corporation — if you condone it. A Christian knows that all men everywhere are his brothers because they are God's well-loved children. Their welfare is his concern. He longs for them to have a chance for what is best for their bodies and minds and souls. His is an endless fight against tyranny and war and all the evils which blight the life of men on earth. The Church must always lead in this struggle for righteousness — not by attempting to control the government, but by producing citizens who will make their government an agency of God.

The Confession of Faith XX:II

There is dynamite in the Gospel. Christians who know that "God alone is Lord of the conscience" have upset empires. They are blasting at the evils in our present social order, driven by their love and pity. They are praying still their ancient prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

BIBLE READINGS

Here are Bible chapters everyone should know. They were selected in this order by a large number of ministers and laymen who were asked by the American Bible Society to name helpful chapters.

John 14
Psalm 23
Matthew 5
Romans 8
I Corinthians 13
Psalm 91
Matthew 6
John 3
Psalm 46
Romans 12
Hebrews 11
Matthew 7
Isaiah 53
Psalm 1
John 15
Isaiah 40
Psalm 27
Psalm 103
Psalm 121
Philippians 4
Isaiah 55
Revelation 21
Luke 15
Ephesians 6
John 17
Luke 2
I Corinthians 15
John 10
Psalm 51
Psalm 37
John 1
Revelation 22
Psalm 90
Joshua 1
Psalm 19
Matthew 11
Exodus 20
I John 3
I John 1

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